

National Acadian Day

Fête Nationale des Acadien(ne)s

Synopsis:

Culture can be largely influenced by and infused with components of religion. The component of religion in culture is often recognized by scholars as implicit religion within cultural context. The Acadian culture and its most prestigious event – National Acadian Day – is a great example of the interconnections between religion and everyday culture. Often times the religious origins of the celebrations remain present through subtle representations, yet the event is mostly based in secular social settings. In certain cases it is religious symbols adopted as cultural symbols, or traditions adopted and modified to fit the secular, or other modes of incorporating and modifying parts of religion to incorporate in secular culture. The persistence of religious rituals in modern-day secular celebrations is a concept that is also gaining importance as we see a decline in church attendance and membership.

In 1881, members of the clergy declared the date of August 15th as the national day of recognition of Acadians. Since 2003, Canada officially recognizes August 15th as National Acadian Day. The Official Act refers to language, culture, and tradition – but not explicitly to religion. Traditionally, with the influence of the clergy in society, the origins of Acadian Day holds high religious significance. Today the cultural celebrations are much more secular in nature but continue to uphold their religious roots for members of the church. The most commonly cited reason for the religious origins of this event is the recognition of this day as the Assumption of Mary and according to Acadian folklore Mary is the patron saint of the Acadians.

One of the main activities for this day of celebration is known as the ‘tintamarre’. The tintatmarre is a newer tradition – since the mid-twentieth century and is meant to demonstrate the vitality, solidarity, and ongoing presence of Acadians in society. The festivity typically involves marching through the community and making noise with improvised instruments and makeshift noisemakers while proudly wearing the colours of the Acadian flag and particularly a representation of the yellow star ‘l’Étoile de l’Acadie’. The secular side of Acadian day includes music festivals, beer gardens, cookouts, boat rides, and other cultural celebrations and family traditions within communities with strong Acadian presence. This photo-essay is from a small Acadian community on the southeast shore of New Brunswick’s August 15th celebration. It includes a day full of tintamarre, traditional Acadian cuisine, music, laughter, and dancing.